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ABSTRACT

A survey ascertained whether Arizona seventh-grade students perceived themselves to have participated in and benefited from career awareness, exploration, and counseling activities. In total, 2,349 seventh-grade students participated in the survey administered in spring 1997 after one full year of school-to-work (STW) regional funding. Students represented 105 schools in all 15 counties across the 13 state-funded partnerships. Students were drawn from English or other general studies classes rather than classes with a vocational or STW emphasis. Statistical analyses were conducted to examine whether responses to each of the 14 questions differed by gender, ethnicity, and partnership. Findings indicated that 54.1 percent of seventh graders had at least some idea of the job or career they want in the future; 32.9 percent had a definite idea of what they want to do. Over half of all students--on at least one occasion--participated in 5 of the 10 career awareness and exploration activities assessed. Most often, student had speakers in their classrooms to talk about careers; least often, students participated in a career fair. Over 91 percent of students who had participated in 5 or more activities had some idea of their career interests. Only 40 percent said someone from school had talked to them individually about career interests. Some students did not believe that all jobs were appropriate for both sexes. Stereotypical views appeared to be held predominantly by young men. (YLB)

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Seventh Grade Students' Perceptions of Career Awareness and Exploration Activities in Arizona Schools

Arizona School To Work Briefing Paper #8 *July 1997*

by
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Morrison Institute for Public Policy

Arizona is in the process of creating a comprehensive *statewide system* of school-to-work opportunities for Arizona students. Supported by a School To Work (STW) grant from the U.S. Departments of Labor and Education, the state is implementing its STW initiative under the auspices of the Governor's Division of School To Work (GDSTW), a branch of the Governor's Office of Workforce Development Policy housed in the Arizona Department of Commerce.

In accordance with the STW Opportunities Act of 1994, Arizona's system is developing such that all students will have opportunities to explore careers in classrooms ***and*** in work-based situations. The state also fosters activities that help students bridge the gap between their school-based and work-based learning experiences. Thus, based on the Act, key components of Arizona's emerging STW system are: School-Based Learning, Work-Based Learning, and Connecting Activities for students.

Morrison Institute for Public Policy is coordinating a multi-faceted evaluation of the state's STW initiative on behalf of the GDSTW. One component of the evaluation involves surveying seventh grade students. Why seventh graders? The STW Opportunities Act of 1994 [Section 102. School-Based Learning Component] states:

"The school-based learning component of a STW Opportunities program *shall include* career awareness and career exploration and counseling (beginning at the earliest possible age, ***but no later than the seventh grade***) in order to help students who may be interested to identify, and select or reconsider, their interests, goals, and career majors, including those options that may not be traditional for their gender, race, or ethnicity."

Thus, the survey was designed to assess whether Arizona seventh grade students, as a whole, perceive themselves to have participated in and benefited from career awareness, exploration, and counseling activities. As part of the evaluation of Arizona's emerging system, the intent was to look at the extent to which career-related activities truly are system-wide. That is, the purpose of the survey was ***not*** to evaluate whether "STW program participants" are receiving school-based learning components as prescribed by the STW Opportunities Act.

Administered in Spring 1997—after one full year of STW regional funding—the results presented in this briefing paper represent a baseline measure of seventh graders' responses upon which future comparisons can be made. Results are limited to state-level "top line" results only. Further analyses are forthcoming.

Survey Design and Methodology: An Overview

The survey was designed by a cadre of evaluators representing each of the 13 state-funded regional partnerships and Morrison Institute staff. The survey was comprised of 14 questions designed to: 1) determine the extent to which students have participated in career awareness and exploration activities appropriate for their grade level, 2) assess the overall impact of such activities, 3) explore who appears to be active in students' lives in terms of adult mentoring, 4) gauge student interest in high school classes that teach job skills, and 5) examine student opinions regarding gender and jobs.

In determining the statewide sample, each regional partnership was assigned a quota that would guarantee a statistically adequate sample of students in their region within the state sample as a whole. Schools then were randomly selected in each

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partnership. Finally, individual classes of seventh graders were identified for each randomly selected school. Therefore, the sample is comprised of one or more classrooms of seventh grade students from randomly selected schools, stratified by partnership.

All students were drawn from English or other general studies classes rather than classes with a vocational or STW emphasis. This was done in order to avoid biasing survey results toward schools and students known to be actively participating within a STW partnership. Survey results, therefore, more accurately reflect the extent to which STW-like activities are system-wide.

In total, 2,349 seventh grade students participated in the survey. Students represent 105 schools in all 15 counties across the 13 state-funded partnerships. Of the respondents, 48 percent are male and 52 percent are female. For those students choosing to report race/ ethnicity, a majority (57 percent) are Anglo/ white, 31 percent are Hispanic, six percent are American Indian, four percent are African American, and two percent are Asian American. At the state level, survey results represent four percent of the state's seventh grade population and are reliable at a 95% level of confidence (with margins of error not exceeding $\pm$ 2.1 percentage points).

All data were scanned and analyzed using SPSS software. State results were weighted by gender and enrollment by partnership. Descriptive statistics for each question were derived for the total sample and by partnership. Statistical analyses were conducted to examine whether there are specific differences in responses to each question by gender, ethnicity, and partnership. Additional analyses are underway to investigate combinations of variables deemed of interest for program improvement.

Summary of Results

Career exploration

The intent of the STW program is to help students to better define their career goals. The majority of seventh graders surveyed have at least some idea of the job or career that they want in the future (54.1%). Nearly one-third (32.9%) have a definite idea of what they want to do in the future. However, 13 percent do not know what job or career they might pursue in the future.

Activities influencing students' career selection

The survey asked students whether they had ever participated in any of ten career awareness and exploration activities suited to students in the elementary and middle grades. Their responses are summarized in Table 1 on the next page. Over half of all students—on at least one occasion—have participated in five of the ten activities assessed. Most often, students report having had speakers in their classrooms to talk about careers. Least often, students report participation in a Career Fair.

What effect have these activities had? Six out of ten students said that at least one activity helped them think about choosing a career. Notably, students who participate in four or more activities are more likely to describe them as helpful. Furthermore, students who participate in a variety of activities are more likely to indicate a career interest. Over 91 percent of students who participated in five or more activities have some idea of their career interests compared to 86 percent for three or four activities, 80 percent for two activities, and less than 70 percent after one activity.

People influencing students' career selection

Asked if an adult had ever talked to them about things like homework, life and career interests, 66.5 percent said "yes." However, only 40 percent said that *someone from school* had talked to them individually about career interests. Table 2 shows that relatively few students have spoken to teachers, counselors, or principals about careers.

Table 2
School personnel providing individual career counseling

School Personnel	# students	% students
Teacher	459	19.5%
Counselor	186	7.9%
Principal	92	3.9%

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Table 1

Arizona Seventh Grade Survey Results: Participation in Career Awareness and Exploration Activities (N = 2, 349)

Activity (ranked by % "No" responses)	Yes, more than once	Yes, once	No
Have **people** ever **come to your school to talk** to you about the work they do?	53.6%	30.2%	16.2%
Have you ever taken a **field trip** to a workplace to see people doing different jobs?	37.7%	29.3%	33.0%
Not counting someone in your family, has an **adult** ever talked with you about things like your homework, life, and career interests?	42.5%	24.0%	33.5%
Have you ever **job shadowed**?	35.4%	29.1%	35.5%
Have you ever worked on a **project in class** that helped you understand jobs?	30.2%	33.8%	36.0%
Has anyone from school talked to you **individually** about your career or job interests?	16.7%	23.6%	59.7%
Have you ever used a **computer** at school to learn about or see people doing different jobs?	18.5%	17.3%	64.2%
Have you ever taken a **tour of your own school** in order to see people doing different jobs?	10.2%	21.1%	68.7%
Have you ever taken a **Career Inventory or other test** to help you decide what kind of careers or jobs you might be good at?	9.1%	21.1%	69.8%
Have you ever gone to a **Career Fair**?	9.3%	20.1%	70.6%

Overall impact of participation	Yes	No
Have any of the activities listed on this survey—like Career Fairs, guest speakers, or talking with someone—made you think about choosing a career?	59.5%	40.5%

Attitudes toward jobs and gender

Student attitudes were explored regarding jobs and gender. Students were asked which of the following statements best reflected their opinion:

- Some jobs are best for women and other jobs are best for men.
- All jobs are equally good for both women and men.

Among all students, over half (53.3%) said that the first statement comes closest to their view. There are, however, statistically significant differences in the response to this question by gender. More boys agree

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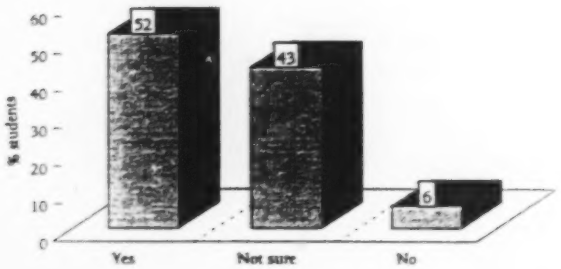
with the first statement than do girls; more girls agree with the second statement than do boys.

High school plans

Students were asked: "Do you plan to take classes in high school that teach job skills?" Figure 1 shows that *over half* of the students said they definitely plan to take such classes. In contrast, only six percent surveyed said they did *not* plan to take classes that teach job skills.

Figure 1
Plans to take high school classes that teach job skills (N = 2, 349)



Note: Percentages do not total 100 due to rounding.

Discussion

This briefing paper presents top line survey results for Arizona seventh grade students. Clearly, results indicate that many students are participating in activities designed to promote career awareness and exploration. Furthermore, such activities appear to have some influence on students insofar as thinking about their futures. Even at this young age, a majority of students have at least some idea of what they want to do as an adult. And many students desire high school classes that foster career skills.

While survey results are, overall, positive, there are at least three issues surfacing from preliminary analyses that warrant dialogue.

First, it is clear that the more activities in which a student participates, the more they are able to report their career interests. Schools should be encouraged to offer multiple activities rather than relying exclusively on "one-shot" events (e.g, Career Days).

Second, relatively few students are receiving ***individualized*** career exploration through activities such as formal counseling, assessment, informal adult mentoring, or the use of technology (e.g., computers). More school-based activities to provide individualized attention may be worth exploring. Additionally, the role of school personnel in providing career guidance should be strengthened. Few students currently rely upon teachers, counselors, or principals in defining their career goals.

Third, student attitudes toward gender and jobs deserve further attention. The STW Opportunities Act promotes helping students identify and select careers that may not be traditional for their gender. Survey results suggest that some students do not believe that all jobs are appropriate for both sexes. Stereotypical views appear to be held predominantly by young men. In order to change these attitudes, the state should consider expanding gender equity activities.

Arizona's SCHOOLTOWORK SYSTEM

For additional information about Arizona's School To Work initiative, contact:

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